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ABSTRACT

This paper describes storyknifing activities practiced by a small group of young girls in a Yup'ik Eskimo village on the Kuskokwim River in Alaska. Storyknifing is a form of play in which girls tell stories to one another, while making drawings and designs in mud or snow. The girls will sit in a circle for hours at a time, taking turns telling stories and using the storyknife to illustrate them. The illustrations are generally in a "blueprint" style which depict houses, furnishings, and people. The activity plays a significant cultural role in the lives of the Yup'ik women, providing a means for them to interpret the tremendous influences of western culture within their world. The authors closely observed storyknifing activities in order to explain how young girls become enculturated into Eskimo society. Despite the tremendous western influences on even the remotest Yup'ik villages in southwestern Alaska, storyknifing continues to serve as a means by which young girls come to know their culture and themselves. Past generations in more traditional Yup'ik Eskimo society used the activity of storyknifing to transmit culture from the elders to the children. Through this activity, which provided hours of entertainment for the young girls, many of the core values, folklore and behaviors of the community were practiced and reinforced. Now, with the westernization of the culture, storyknifing is, in many villages, no longer part of the daily lives of the children. Contains 11 references, 2 stories and several symbols used in storyknifing. (TES)

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YUP'IK WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING

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In this paper, we provide a description of storyknifing activities currently practiced by a small group of young girls in a Yup'ik Eskimo village on the Kuskokwim River. Storyknifing is just one activity where culture is learned and explored, but it is a significant one for Yup'ik girls.

Storyknifing is a form of play for girls in which oral stories are told to one another accompanied by drawings and designs in the mud or snow. The girls sit in a circle taking turns telling stories to one another for hours at a time. Each narrator uses an implement known as a storyknife to illustrate the story as she speaks. The illustrations drawn to accompany the stories are in a "blueprint" style which depict houses, furnishings and people.

Storyknifing plays a significant role in the everyday lives of Yup'ik women and girls. It provides a means for them to interpret the tremendous influences of western culture within their world. Our study enabled us to understand storyknifing not just as a play activity, but as a means of understanding the way in which Yup'ik girls come to know and value their culture.

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore, not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973, p. 5).

Geertz' metaphor beautifully describes our attempt to understand and interpret the webs of significance for Yup'ik Eskimo girls and women in southwestern Alaska. We have begun to sort through these webs by studying a childhood play activity called storyknifing. We believe that storyknifing activities will illuminate how young girls become enculturated into Eskimo society. Spradley and McCurdy (1980) describe enculturation as a process in which people learn appropriate ways to look at experience, define existence and acquire a body of shared cultural values. The enculturation process takes

place within the interactions of individuals with other members of the culture. Often anthropologists talk about enculturation in terms of what has been learned - work and gender roles, kinship patterns, political and economic structures, practical skills and the arts forms of the culture. Until rather recent ethnographic accounts of children's play activities, very little has been available to explain the process of <u>how</u> this enculturation actually occurs.

Despite the popularity of this activity throughout the Yup'ik region, there is little literature on storyknifing. Ager (1975, 1980, 1982) relied solely on recollections of high school and college age women about their childhood storyknifing activities. In an earlier study, Oswalt (1964) described storyknifing in the area of Napaskiak on the Kuskokwim River. He collected a series of stories as a portion of a larger ethnographic study. He relied on stories told to him by Yup'ik girls in English despite the fact that at that time their stories were related to each other solely in Yup'ik. The stories, rather than a detailed analysis of the process of the activity, are the product of this research. No studies to date have chronicled the storyknifing activities as they occur in the daily life of village Yup'ik children. We have been able to study children as they play in their natural setting and have collected a body of field data which provides an in-depth exploration of present day storyknifing. Our findings presented here are based on a preliminary analysis of the data collected in the spring and summer of 1987 as well as data collected during 1986-87 school year when Bennett lived in the Kuskokwim area and worked directly with Yup'ik women attending a University of Alaska-Fairbanks field-based program. The Storyknife Project, funded by the Alaska Humanities Forum, officially began in the summer of 1987 and will continue at least through August, 1988.

An anthropological perspective which stresses an understanding of storyknifing from the viewpoint of the participants is the cornerstone of this project. Only through enabling Yup'ik people to tell their own story can we fully understand the meaning of this process to them.

METHODOLOGY

The primary methods for data collection are participant observation and ethnographic interviewing (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Spradley, 1979). In addition to our previous work in the Kuskokwim Delta area during the 1986-87 school year, we spent approximately one month in the summer of 1987 living with an extended Yup'ik family in a small Eskimo village in this area. We gathered an extensive amount of data during this period in the form of fieldnotes, informal interviews with children and adults, photographs, and audio and videotapes. We also visited several other villages in order to build a wider knowledge base for our descriptions of the storyknifing process as well as to understand the extent to which storyknifing is still an active part of the culture of young girls in these villages. We have continued the study during the 1987-88 school year through ethnographic interviewing of Yup'ik Eskimo college students who participated in storyknifing as children in villages in southwestern Alaska.

The initial questions which guided our research are the following:

1. When and how does storyknifing occur in the community?
2. Who are the participants?
3. What are the types and content of the stories told?
4. What themes and/or values are expressed in the stories?
5. How has storyknifing changed with the increased introduction of Western culture into this area?
6. What symbols are used in the storyknife illustrations?
7. What are the communicative styles of the storytelling?

DESCRIPTION OF THE STORYKNIFING ACTIVITY

Storyknives

Historically storyknives were made of ivory, wood or reindeer antlers, usually by the fathers and grandfathers of the young girls. Present day

storyknives are generally the family's kitchen knife or butter knife. Story-knives are also made by filing the metal bands removed from building supplies which have been brought into the villages by barge. The following quotations from three of our informants provide richer descriptions of their storyknives:

> The storyknives we mainly used were like bailing wire from construction places. Sometimes we used to go down where they were building houses and stuff. So we would take it out from those woods [building supplies] and those woods would start falling and the old women would chase us. We used to do that all the time. Then when we would get the bailing wire out, we'd cut them in pieces. When we'd have a whole bunch, we'd go to the place where there is cement and we'd scrape them to our desired shape. Like some of them were shaped like that with rounded edges. Some of them were pointed like that. And my favorite, oh, that was the best, where they were banded together already or sometimes we tried to be cool and have different shapes and have both shapes - one sided rounded and one side pointed - two sided. My sister had a whole collection of storyknives. She never did let us use them so most of the times we were stuck with our own. Other times we'd take mom's butter knives, but I guess she wouldn't let us take them. Then other times, when there was nothing around, I took a spoon, one of my mom's wooden spoons and pounded it with a hammer. Or sometimes, when you're just sitting around, you'd just take a piece of wood.

> I don't have my old ones. We used to use those, you know, metal bands they strap boxes and crates with. We used to do storyknifing with those metal bands. We never used to really like the wide ones. They were too wide, you know, but there were some that were too flimsy, that you can't really hold onto them. But there were some that were just the right size, the right width and we'd get those bands and we'd break them in half, you know, just keep bending them back until it breaks off, then we'd get, what you call, wire cutters and like we'd have a piece of band like this, let me draw a picture here. We'd have a piece of band like this, then we'd cut a piece off like this with the wire cutter and then we'd have another, so it would be like this. Then we'd get a file, and then file these parts, you know, roundish like so they won't be too sharp and file those ends and sometimes we'd have round shapes like this and sometimes we'd have sort of pointy shapes. And my grandpa used to make a whole bunch for us too, and then, later as we got older, you know, we could use the wire cutters and file, so we'd make our own, and sometimes we try to have the most storyknives than anyone else - try to find wire bands and make a whole bunch and oh, sometime we'd use our butterknives. We used to ask my mom if we could take a butterknife and sometimes she'd give us some of her old ones, or if she doesn't have any she'd give us a butterknife and say, you know, "Make sure you bring it

> in now". We'd say, "We will" and we'd go out and start storyknifing and we'd lose them outside or and then we'd try to ask her again later for another butterknife and she won't give them to us and she'd say, "You're losing all my butterknives".
>
> My dad made me a wooden storyknife, but it didn't work as good because it wasn't flexible enough and scratched the mud or scraped it off and so I never did use that. Silverware that didn't have grooves in it were better, more smoother, that were bendable. Some butterknives have grooves in them, but the ones that didn't worked better and they were wider. A friend of mine had a real good one that was really wide, was a big butterknife with a wide blade. It was the only one in Alaska.

The ivory storyknives were more commonly used prior to and in the generation of women who are now the mothers of the college students we interviewed. These storyknives were reserved for winter time storyknifing in the snow as explained by our informants:

> Well, I never storyknifed in the snow. My mom used to though. I guess if they storyknifed in the snow, they used to use ivory knives and she has a whole bunch of those, and she has, I think, one that she used to use and be storyknifing in the snow with ivory.

Phases of the Storyknifing Activity

We have identified three major phases involved in the storyknifing activity. The first is what we refer to as "Getting Ready". This includes the following activities:

1. A group of girls gather and make a decision to go "yarooking", the Yup'ik word for storyknifing. Our observations revealed that this may be a decision made when the girls are already together at someone's house or playing on the monkeybars in the center of the village or it may entail one of the girls calling the others on the phone to arrange for such a gathering. It is a cooperative decision in that all girls agree to go storyknifing rather than to engage in a different activity. They also agree where to go to do the storyknifing.
2. Each of the girls then gets her storyknife and as a group they proceed to the designated storyknifing place.

3. The girls sit down in front of the places where they sat during previous sessions and begin to prepare the mud at these places by scraping, spitting, adding wet mud, digging a hole next to their place for additional wet mud, scraping the borders around their place, etc. The girls usually take the same place each time. If the weather has been particularly rainy, the girls may find boards to sit on as part of this initial "getting ready" phase. This phase was described by one of our older informants as follows:

> Well, we'd get our storyknives and we'd find a clear spot and if it was messy we'd clear up some wood chippings or grass and stuff and smooth it out, and we'd usually like to go over it with smooth mud or clayish mud-like and, you know, with the side [of the storyknife] and then with the flat part we'd smooth it out, and sometimes if it wasn't moist enough, we'd spit on there. If we wanted it moister, we'd spit on there and sometimes, you know, after you dry it, after you do something on it [draw], smooth it out again if your gonna tell another story, or are waiting for someone to tell a story and we'd dig a hole in the mud here, a little hole by our storyknifing place and we'd add more on top and put more mud on top and erase it off again and we'd get logs or a piece of can and we'd sit down there. Well, I guess whoever had a story ready to tell then, or you know, someone who really wanted to tell a story, they'd tell a story.

The next phase of the storyknifing activity is the actual storytelling. Here there is a call for a story in the form of a statement such as "Who has a story?" or a bid for a turn in the form of statement such as "I remember when...." A story begins in this way. While one girl talks and illustrates her story the others listen attentively. They may continue to work the mud at their places. After one girl completes a story, another begins. The older girls tended to take the lead in the storyknifing sessions we observed.

The final "wrapping up" phase of the storyknifing session begins when there is a lull in the talk, usually after a couple hours of activity and storytelling. One of the girls writes "yes" on her place and the other follow suit. This signals the end of the storyknifing activity and the girls generally get up and go off to their homes or to another activity. During one observation,

Margaret (aged 9) wrote her "yes" during the middle of someone's story. When this was ignored, she whispered to the girl next to her who proceeded to write "yes" and the two girls left the circle. This behavior was very unusual. Margaret had been attempting to seek group consensus to stop for this short break. She had to urinate, convinced another girl to accompany her to the back of a nearby building, and when she had finished, the pair returned to the storyknifing circle.

A Typical Evening

It is approximately seven o'clock in the evening and we have just finished a dinner of boiled duck, rice and salad. We all made a rather large dent in the huge bowl of agutak, an Eskimo favorite, which consists of a variety of wild berries, sugar and something to hold it together - usually a mixture of instant mashed potatoes and Crisco. The adults continue to sit around the small circular table in the kitchen talking and drinking tea. The talk is a mixture of Yup'ik and English. Adam and Anastasia (aged 73 and 72) are the owners and elders of this home and have graciously included us in their lives as friends of their daughter (Xenia), son-in-law (Michael), and grandchildren (Kasha, Stasha and Mike). The elders speak very little English, but seem to understand quite a bit and we are able to communicate comfortably. The researchers are not Yup'ik speakers, so must rely on Michael and Xenia for translations.

The children left the table when they finished and went into the living room to watch television with their friends who live in small houses in the immediate neighborhood. The increasing number of young girls gathering in the living room makes it apparent that the activities are about to change. This is confirmed by Margaret, who comes into the kitchen and waves her storyknife at us. This is her signal that the girls are going out to storyknife. Kasha

and Stasha reach up and grab their storyknives from the ledge above the door to the outside of the house, their secret hiding place. Their knives have been made by cutting and filing pieces of the metal bands which secure building materials that are barged into the village. Pieces of these bands can be easily found around the village.

The girls walk through tundra grass and across a long boardwalk to one of their favorite storyknifing spots on the bank of the river. These boardwalks are built throughout the village because of the constant summer rain and mud. It is very difficult to walk on the slippery tundra mud without falling. The children have a practice of having one set of clothing for inside the house and another for outside due to the inevitability of becoming covered with mud.

Storyknifing is generally done in the summer when the mud is workable. Since it is August in Alaska, there are still many hours of daylight to enjoy, although the girls are aware that the curfew bell will ring at ten o'clock.

When we arrive at the storyknife "place" on the river bank near Margaret's house, the girls immediately take "their" places and begin to work the mud with their knives. Looking around the small circle of children, we noticed that there are five girls - Stasha (11), Kasha (10), Michelle (10), Olga (12) and Margaret (9). Each has a storyknife - either a metal butter knife from the kitchen or one made from the metal banding. They are all busy preparing their places for the next phase of actual storytelling. Two of the "tagalongs" or younger children, sit behind, but close to their sibling to watch the activity. This evening Mike and Olga's sister, Andrea, who are both five years old, are present. Although the activity is gender specific to girls, it is acceptable in some cases for brothers to watch. According to all of our informants, Eskimo boys never engage in the storyknifing activities.

We watch as the girls deepen the borders around their places, dig deep, narrow holes next to their places and use the soft wet mud from these holes to spread across their storyknife "place". The girls use their saliva to moisten the mud by spitting on their places. This is commonly done throughout the storyknifing activity. After about ten minutes, the places are of the consistency preferred by each of the girls. Kasha prefers her to be very soft, so she sometimes leaves the circle to find softer mud closer to the river which she brings back to her place. These differences in preference are discussed by the girls. Kasha pokes her knife into the other places to test their consistency. Overall, the storyknife places have the consistency of thick, creamy, chocolate icing.

The next phase of the activity begins with a bid for a story such as "Who has a story?" or "Do you remember when..." or "One time I had a dream." One of the girls begins to relate a story which is illustrated on the story-knife place. As she talks, the other girls listen attentively and at the same time continue to stroke their storyknife places with their knives. Occasionally, the excess mud gets scraped onto their shoes. If the girls are really involved in the story, they may imitate the storyknifer's drawing on their own place. After a particularly scary story told by Olga, Stasha remarked, "I was copying you when all the people were getting killed". At the end of a story, the teller makes a statement such as "That's all I know" to indicate that she is finished. Olga's statement following her telling of a very scary dream, finished with the statement, "It was crazy!"

The girls take turns telling stories and drawing accompanying illustrations with their storyknives. There is no set pattern for turntaking. Following the completion of one story, another girl begins, usually with something that relates to the last story. For example, following Olga's scary dream, Stasha stated that she remembered a dream she once had and proceeded to tell that story.

The storyknifing sessions usually last for two or three hours. This evening, when the girls had finished telling stories, they drew some designs on their places and played guessing games with each other. There seemed to be mutual consent when it was time to stop the storyknifing activity for the evening. After a lull in the talk, Olga wrote the word "yes" on her storyknife place. Each of the other girls followed her lead and did the same. The "yes" is the ritualistic way the storyknifing sessions end for this group of girls. It was interesting that each girl's "yes" was stylized and very different from the others. (See attached diagrams). Then the girls got up from their places and went off as a group, talking and laughing, to the monkeybars. Sometimes the girls stayed at the activity until the curfew bell was sounded.

Sites for Storyknifing

In this particular village, there are several sites used for the storyknifing activity. The favorite place is under the old, blue BIA school. The girls refer to this place as the "blue school". It has been a favorite place for three generations according to Michael. Margaret's mother, Minnie, who is also Xenia's sister, told us that the blue school was one of their favorite places for storyknifing when they were young girls. The girls crawl under the school at an opening about two feet high near one end that has been worn down over time from children going in and out. Just inside this opening, there is a circle of storyknife "places" remaining from previous sessions there. The girls explained to us that this is a good place because it enables them to hide from the boys who sometimes ride their bikes through the activity. It is also a place that stays relatively dry during the rainy summer season and still maintains enough moisture in the mud to be of the appropriate consistency for the activity. A college student from this village described the same school as one of her storyknifing places:

> We had special, our own little special places. It would be like, probably under the school, if we were at school. Or it would be by somebody's house where the dirt was really good.

Another favorite among the girls is the place on the edge of the village by the river bank. It is out of the way of both bike and pedestrian traffic, has a good quantity of suitable mud and also provides a lovely view of the river. The storyknifing places on this site are well worn and appear to have been there for a long time.

Minnie told us that in the spring, she and Xenia used to walk across the river on the ice just prior to break-up time to storyknife over there. Again, this was a place that was out of the way of the village traffic and therefore afforded some privacy. The girls mentioned several other storyknifing places, but during our observations in the village, these were not used by the children. They tended to use the same two places repeatedly.

While we have found storyknifing to be primarily a summertime activity, there is some indication that is used to be more widespread throughout the year. One of our informants in another village out on the Bering Sea coast explained that she and her friends used to carry snow to their porches in the winter and spend hours storyknifing there in the snow. Other informants told us of taking mud on boards inside their houses for winter storyknifing.

Types of Stories

Through a preliminary analysis of the data, we have identified the following types of stories told by the girls during the storyknifing sessions:

1. Eskimo Folk Tales

We observed several Eskimo folk tales told by the girls during the storyknifing activity. We found out that these had been learned from a book of folk tales given to Stasha and Kasha by their mother. This is one way in which their mother insured that the girls become familiar with the traditional tales.

We were told by both Xenia and Minnie that they consider the maintenance of the Yup'ik language and culture to be extremely important. Minnie explained that she was very pleased that Yup'ik language classes would be taught in the school for the first time during the 1987-88 school year.

The story of the "Raven and the Mink" (see attached transcript) was told on several occasions. This was a story in which a husband, the raven, scared his wife, the mink, by hiding and pretending to be someone else who demanded the food she had prepared. It was interesting that the ending, although basically consistent in content, varied in the amount of elaboration provided. For example, here are two variations of endings for this story taken directly from the transcriptions:

> So she took a piece of the wood and threw it into the hole opening and the voice went away and when her husband came back and here's the raven's beak (drawing it) and he has his hand over his eye and she told to look in his eye and she saw a piece of charred wood in his eye and she took it out and she was upset that she [he] was scaring her and making, teasing her and making her scared, and but she forgave him later on in their marriage but they never had any children after that incident.

> ...and she looked in his eye. There was a piece of charred wood in his eye. She took it out and she was really furious with him cause he had been unfaithful to her and she was scared of that voice and after that incident they never had any children. That's all. That's all I know.

Although both versions relate the same basic storyline, the second introduces the notion of the husband's unfaithfulness, which is not mentioned anywhere else in the story and is not explained in any way.

2. Everyday Events

These are stories that retell daily adventures. For example, one day we accompanied a group of about ten children to a beach by the river which they referred to as "Hawaii" because of its unusual sandy beach. In order to get there, we walked down a path from the south end of the village, through

some bushes and out onto the beach. The children spent over an hour digging in the sand, making sand sculptures, etc. That evening during the storyknifing activity, one of the girls told and illustrated the story of "going to Hawaii". Her drawing detailed the paths, trees, river, beach, participants, and the fishcamp seen on the way home. This story was typical of this type. These stories such are introduced by phrase such as "remember the time we..." Everyday events include tales of going to fishcamp, going berrypicking, events that happened at school during the school, etc.

3. Scary Stories

On several occasions the girls used dreams as the basis for their storyknifing tales. The dreams tended to be rather violent as is illustrated in Olga's Dream (attached). This type of story was also reported by our college students:

> Well, actually the kinds of stories I remember were sort of scary, I guess. Like there was this one story about the little girls who used the storyknife in the evening. She was all by herself. It was too dark and some kind of ghost grabbed her hand right from her storyknife and was trying to pull her. A friend of mine was telling that one and it was sort of like in the evening and she ran home.
>
> The stories they used to tell long ago are sort of like teaching us lessons of some sort, like not to stay out too late, or you know, never do this or do that, you know, like if you're hunting or berry picking, or if you are alone, like they sort of teach us something. And other stories we make'em up, you know, just make up our own stories as we go along, or try to think of scary stories or scare the people that are with us, you know, storyknifing, or funny stories, just make up our own, I guess.

4. Media

These stories involved tales taken from media either from videotaped movies or television shows. The stories we observed included one based on cartoons such as the "Gummie Bears" and one based on the movie, "Children of the Corn" by Stephen King.

5. Games

A number of games were used in the storyknifing activities. One game that came up regularly in our interviews and observations was called "Guess House". This is played by having one girl draw a blueprint type diagram of a house with the all the furniture inside and the other participants guess who the house belongs to based on the arrangement of furnishings. This game was described by our older interviewees:

> From what I could remember, you know, kids my age, back then, we storyknifed when we like played, when we were trying to play, like we called it "guess-guess whose house". And we'd make up this like a box-like thing and make rooms and divide the box up into little sections. I mean like describe the house. And that's why we called it guess-guess whose house.

> But if it's a story about guessing games, like "whose house", they [the other girls] would take turns...You try to pick a house that nobody knows in the village, that nobody ever visits and you've been there and then you draw the house and that person tries to guess it.

Another game involves guessing what a word is that has been drawn in design form. For example, on one occasion the word "HELLO" was drawn with one letter directly over another so that the result was more in the form of a design. The girl offered this design to the others in order for them to guess the word.

6. Designs

Although we observed only one design activity during our observations, this type of storyknifing activity was reported by older women in interviews. We watched the girls practice drawing a particular geometric design during one session. When asked where they learned the design, we were told that Margaret's mother had taught it to them. When we talked to Minnie, she explained that she had learned different designs by watching her mother when she made the borders for parkas. She practiced these designs in her storyknifing and taught one of these designs to the girls while they were storyknifing this past summer. Other women have confirmed this practice of using the

storyknifing activity as a means to practice and create designs which could be used later in their skin sewing.

Types of Symbols

We have included drawings of the types of symbols used by the girls in their storyknifing activities. Although there are fundamental forms necessary for the diagrams, there is also room for individualized style. For example, the figure drawn for females, must have two top vertical lines, two bottom vertical lines and some type of separating lines. However, we collected eight different variations of the female figure drawn by the girls. The male counterpart matched the female. The male figure must have three vertical lines on top and two on the he bottom with a separating line in the middle. When we asked about how the girls determine what symbols to use for the male and female figures, Stasha told us they draw whichever figure is "easiest and fastest" to draw.

Differences in the symbols can be seen from one village to another and also from generation to generation within the same village. For example, the male and female figures drawn by one of the women elders in a coastal village was very different from that drawn by the girls we observed. In the same village, Margaret's mother, Minnie, drew a unisex figure and indicated that when she was storyknifing as a young girl, they did not differentiate according to sex.

Symbols change with the changing culture and westernization of the villages. Symbols for old style houses are rounded; newer houses are drawn as rectangles. On one occasion, when one of the girls was attempting to draw a house with two stories, another remarked, "Two floors. You're in trouble." Symbols for monkeybars, swings, slides and seesaws that are common in the storyknifing we observed, of course, were not drawn prior to those articles being introduced into the culture with the building of schools and playgrounds in the villages.

The use of the symbol "yes" to signify the end of a story was not used by the women in Xenia and Minnie's generation in this village. Their storyknife was totally in Yup'ik, whereas the storyknifing we observed was entirely in English. It is quite possible that because the English speaking world is a literate one, the girls incorporate English letters into their storyknifing. They are combining the oral with the literate tradition in present day storyknifing.

Our data analysis of the storyknife symbols is still in very early stages. Other than descriptions of the symbols, we will not attempt to offer any interpretations here. The attached diagrams illustrate the symbols we observed.

YUP'IK WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING

What are the ways of knowing that Yup'ik girls and women learn through their participation in storyknifing? How does storyknifing fit into the webs of meaning these Yup'ik girls are weaving for themselves in this process of enculturation? The traditional Eskimo culture is an oral one. People learn primarily through listening to and observing the activities of others. Stories, rather than explanations, are paramount in the enculturation process. Stories told in storyknifing help to reinforce the cultural traditions, values and skills. There is little question that storyknifing for women who are presently mothers and grandmothers in the village deeply affected the way these women came to know themselves and their worlds and is still engrained in their actions today. This is evident in the way in which Xenia or Minnie illustrate daily conversation in storyknife fashion with their fingers on the table or in the mud as they speak. Grandmother Anastasia's story told in the steambath to a small group of women about the way her husband built their fishcamp on a series of hills is very much like the stories the girls tell in their storyknifing sessions. She described rhythmically how she

must walk up to get to the cutting table and up to get to the drying rack and up to get to the smoke house and up to get to the house. At the end of her story she laughed and said that her husband "must be a little mouse" for building the fishcamp like this. It is not difficult to envision Stasha or Olga telling and illustrating such a story.

Historically in Eskimo society, boys were enculturated into the group by listening to stories and participating in men's activities. The traditional center for these activities was the men's community house called the "gasgig." With the westernization of the culture, men and boys no longer use these community houses. There is no longer a male analog to storyknifing for boys. Although this paper does not attempt to address how boys learn about their world, it is interesting to note that despite the tremendous changes brought about by western influences, women and girls in some villages maintain and even encourage this traditional activity of storyknifing through which they learn about themselves and their worlds.

In the following pages, we will describe the categories of cultural and cognitive knowledge which are found in the storyknifing activities we observed. Although they overlap somewhat, these categories will provide more specific means to understand storyknifing as a way of knowing for these Yup'ik girls.

Cultural Knowledge

Kinship Patterns

Present day storyknifing continues to teach young girls about the kinship patterns within the village. Eskimo culture is one of connected relationships and the sense of family is still very strong in the villages. The actual stories contain much useful information about family and village relationships. Explanations of family histories are also prevalent in the stories the children tell. For example, in their stories of everyday events, the girls tell about

the people they saw during the day and where they fit into the kinship system. Often, one girl will have information which corrects or supports another's account. The stories may explain why a member of the community is known by a particular nickname, to which family a woman belonged prior to her marriage or how certain people are related to others. The stories are a means by which the girls can work together to construct the kinship system of the community.

Historically, Eskimo culture has relied heavily on cooperation among its members in order to survive in a subsistence lifestyle under extreme environmental conditions. Through closely knit kinship systems, Yup'ik communities are able to maintain this cooperation. The storyknifing activity serves as a means for the girls to practice group cooperation and consensus. They are the cornerstones of the activity. The girls decide together when to begin and end the activity. They encourage each other to take turns telling stories. There is a sense of group solidarity in the behavior of the girls as well as in the content of the stories.

Gender Roles

Male and female roles are of primary focus in the content of the stories. In the traditional folk tales told by the girls, men did the hunting and fishing while women performed the duties involved in food preparation and childrearing. Women in the folk tales, although traditional in their roles, were also portrayed as powerful people, as is evidenced in the story of "The Mink and the Raven."

The stories told about everyday events provide the girls with a means to explore the ways in which these roles are changing in the village setting. For example, their everyday stories include activities of men and women that are not necessarily along traditional lines. Women hold jobs and go to college. Men help with preparing fish and going berrypicking.

In actual storyknifing sessions, the girls display to one another ways in which they are handling the responsibilities of child care in the nurturing behavior displayed with young brothers and sisters who are the "tagalongs." We often observed the girls caring for and comforting younger brothers and sisters. The responsibility to the family unit is extremely important and reinforced through the play activities of girls.

Orality

The oral tradition is being continued and practiced in this activity. Girls retell some of the traditional folk tales as well as create stories and games of their own. They learn to perform for others in a setting which is comfortable and non-threatening. This performance allows for individual recognition from their peers. Although Stasha stated that the girls were "all about the same" in their storyknifing skills, we observed that some told particular stories better than others and were called on to do so by the group.

Practice Subsistence Skills

In this culture of subsistence living and scarce resources, storyknifing in the past provided a means by which girls could practice the skills of the adult women. For example, drawing a parka border design in a storyknifing sessions allowed the girls to practice what they had observed their mothers cutting out of skin. Today, there is less evidence of practicing the sewing skills needed in later life, but there continues to be discussion about how to pick berries and also how to cut, dry and smoke fish.

Community Norms and Values

Many of the earlier folktales and "scary" stories told through the storyknifing process were means to teach the norms and values of the community. Consequences for inappropriate behavior were incorporated into these stories.

For example, some of the stories mentioned earlier described consequences for children staying out after dark or for husbands who were unfaithful to their wives. Women in some villages continue to teach the traditional folk-tales to their children in order to reinforce the Yup'ik values.

In addition to serving the purposes of transmitting the norms and values of the community, the scary or violent stories told by the girls currently seem to serve as a means for dealing with the more violent aspects of their daily lives. In our living and working in the Yup'ik community, we gained a sense of some of the violence that touches their daily lives in the form of western media, alcoholism and violent crime. Many of our conversations with villagers revolved around violence that had hit close to home. Reports of rapes and deaths, usually resulting from alcohol abuse, were frequent. Violent themes were also evident in the stories told by the young girls. Olga's Dream which graphically describes murder and retelling of a horror film ("Children of the Corn") are typical examples of these themes. In a culture which is undergoing tremendous change, storyknifing provides a forum for discussing intense life situations and frightening experiences. It offers to the girls a palette on which their experiences can be described and then quickly wiped away. In the most violent portions of their stories, the girls would stab the mud to punctuate their words, then effectively smooth the mud palette into its original condition. Fantasies and fears can be expressed, shared with close friends and then swept away.

Cognitive Knowledge

In the area of cognitive knowledge, storyknifing provides a forum for learning or reinforcing many cognitive skills. Skills involving observation, spatial relationships, sequencing, classification, making inferences and prediction were repeatedly evident in the activity. For example, the game called "Guess Whose House" requires that the children draw very detailed

blue-print type diagrams. In order to complete this type of activity, careful observation of the interior of houses in the village is required. The girls must know the exact placement of all the furniture in the house they are representing. The symbols for the furniture must be drawn correctly according to their placement in the house, requiring skill in observation and spatial relationships. Symbols for the household items and for people are classified according to type. The skill of sequencing is of primary importance in stories in which the girls relate their daily activities. These are told in the exact order in which they occurred.

Careful observation of natural phenomena and daily events are required in order to produce storyknife stories. Knowledge of their environment was the focus of many of the stories. For example, talk about vegetation, the weather, the river, local animals, etc., were all integral parts of daily life stories. This awareness and exploration of the natural environment provides a means for girls to share and construct knowledge about their worlds.

Younger children (about six years old and younger), commonly referred to as "tagalongs", learn the concept of sound-symbol relationship. They observe the girls telling stories and drawing symbols to represent their spoken language. This is an essential skill in a literate society. Storyknifing may serve to prepare these children for the world of schooling through the reinforcement of these cognitive processes.

Summary

Despite the tremendous western influences on even the remotest Yup'ik villages in southwestern Alaska, storyknifing continues to serve as a means by which young girls come to know their culture and themselves. Vygotsky (1978) explained that through playing, conversing, listening to others and drawing out their own voices, people develop a sense that they can communicate

and reason with one another. External dialogues are necessary in order to develop inner speech and awareness of one's own thought processes. The environment which supports and encourages Yup'ik storyknifing provides for its children a very rich base of experiences vital to the development of these skills. Yup'ik girls are provided with a forum for working in a connected and related manner with others to find their own voices.

Past generations in more traditional Yup'ik Eskimo society used the activity of storyknifing to transmit culture from the elders to the children. Through this activity which provided hours of entertainment for the young girls, many of the core values, folklore and behaviors of the community were practiced and reinforced. Now, with the westernization of the culture, in many villages, storyknifing is no longer part of the daily lives of the children. In response to our question concerning whether children storyknifing could still be seen in the Yup'ik villages, our interviewees, all from different villages, responded:

> Well, I don't really see much [children storyknifing in the village today]. My cousins, they try to storyknife, you know, they don't, and I'm sure they don't know much of the old stories because I never see anyone, you know, we never tell them. I don't know that many old stories, you know. There is no one around telling some of the old stories they used to tell, so they just sort of make up their own, or just storyknife just to be storyknifing, I suppose.
>
> Not as much as when we were younger, I guess. Nowadays they like to watch TV or they'd be embarassed to do that.
>
> I don't see them doing it, no. Not anymore.
>
> Well, it seems like kids now don't play out as much as we used to, because you know, they watch a lot of TV and videos...It was great! We played out a lot. Sometimes I feel sorry for these kids who just don't get out to play as often as I did when I was growing up.

The women in the village in our study were very concerned that some of the traditional lifestyle was being lost. They were pleased that they were able to have a bilingual program started in the school for the

1987-88 academic year in order to reinforce the Yup'ik language. They were actively involved in teaching the girls the traditional behaviors in their daily lives. Much of this teaching was in the form of demonstrating subsistence skills, telling stories and participating in the storyknife activities of the girls. For the parents, storyknifing provides an important link to a more traditional Native society. For the girls, it provides a forum for exploring and constructing meaning in a culture which is undergoing tremendous and rapid change.

Tale of the Raven and the Mink

Direct transcription from videotape:

Stasha - Once upon a time there was this mink

Kasha - Always once upon a time

Stasha - and the raven and they were married and a long time ago the houses used to be like this and there'd be a fireplace in the middle and a hole at the top and over here would be a tunnel to go outside. One day the um mink and the raven were inside the house and the raven told the mink to make some agutak cause he was gonna go out and hunt so he went out because he told her to make the agutak cause he might be hungry, so he went out and after he went she heard a voice down the opening and the voice said "Mink gimme some agutak else I'll eat you" so she gave half the agutak to that voice. Then he said again "Voice [Mink], gimme some agutak else I'll eat you". So she gave all the agutak and he at it and when her husband came home, he asked where the agutak was and she told him the voice came and took all the agutak and the next day he went to get firewood and he told the mink to make agutak again so he could have it when he came back and then after he left she heard that voice again from down in the tunnel and it said, "Mink, gimme some agutak else I'll eat you". So she gave more of the agutak, half the agutak, then she, there was a voice: "Gimme some agutak else I'll eat you", so she tossed the agutak in and when her husband came home she told him that the voice came again and she was scared and that night, the next day she had the fire lit and it was going out a little bit and there was smoke a little bit in the hole and he was going out to go hunting and shoot birds and he told her to make agutak again and he went out. When the voice came again from down in the tunnel, the voice said "Mink, gimme some agutak else I'll eat you". So she three half the agutak into the hole and the voice came again, "Mink, gimme some agutak else I'll eat you". So she took a piece of the wood and threw it into the hole opening and the voice went away and when her husband came back and here's the raven's beak [referring to drawing], and he has his hand over his eye and she told to look in his eye and saw a piece of charred wood in his eye and she took it out and she was upset that she [he] was scaring her and um, making, teasing her and making her scared and, but she forgave him later on in their marriage but they never had any children after that incident.

Olga's Dream

Olga draws very quickly while she tells her story so that much of the telling related below in punctuated by her drawings. Her storytelling style is rapid and rhythmic.

Olga - I had a dream like this. The river, that house. Alai [getting the attention of Michelle whose Yup'ik name is Alai], remember that dream I told you that house, right there, you know the people, I swear to Christ, in the house and I went in and I saw a couch, the stove, the house was like this, the couch, the stove was right there, then I didn't see anything else but there was a little table over there and when I went in there was nobody and I saw some dead people.

Kasha - There's dead people?

Olga - Um, hm, in the house and I saw a pot, here was the stove, the pot and I saw heads and hearts and guts and everything and then when I looked back at that couch there was a man and I ran out, was scared, then I swam across...[UN]....then when I told everybody, you know, at [name of town] they swam across, "Let's go see this man and kill him" [higher tone of voice to indicate someone else talking] and then when they didn't come back out, they were dead. Well, now the people were, the house was almost full and then you know like this and I went to go get a knife from my house and then you know there was this house, the roof, the people were dead...[UN]...and the couch, he was sitting there, he was eating, I forgot to tell this that he was eating the guts and heads and everything and I went in, I killed, they were dead and I went, I stabbed the people with a knife and when I went right here, the table, the people were here and then I went, I stabbed some of the people were here and then I went, I stabbed some of the people and then I finally killed that person. Then I woke up. It was crazy!

Kasha - Umgh! It was like real life.

Another - Oooooh!

Stasha - I was copying you when all the people...

Stasha - One time I had a dream...(begins to relate hers).

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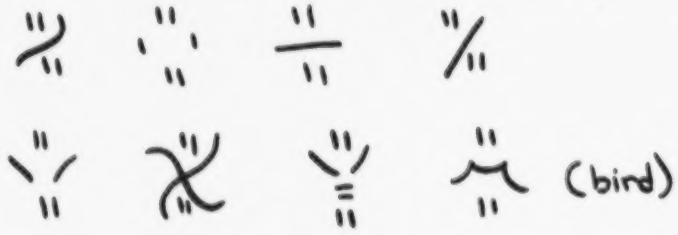
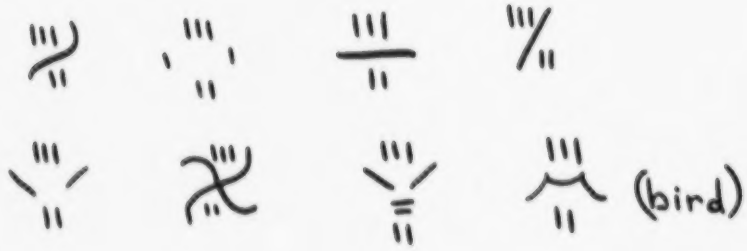
Kuskokwim Area - Girls' Storyknife Figures

Female Figures:

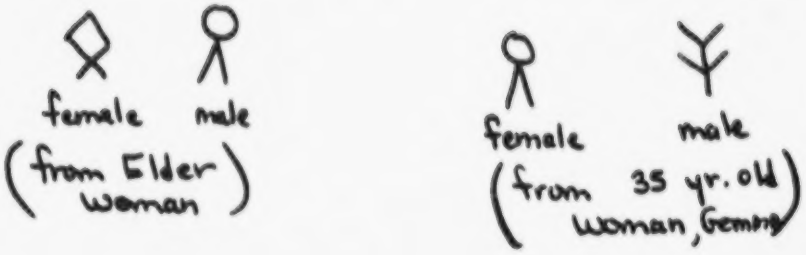


Male Figures:

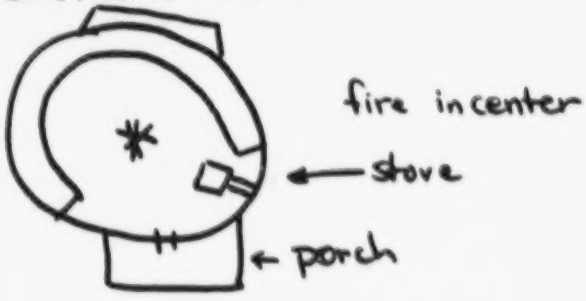


Minnie's Figures: (age 40)

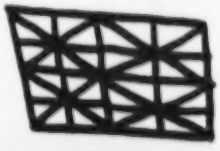
Coastal Figures:



Coastal drawing of old style house - Gemma's mother's drawing of grandmother's house:

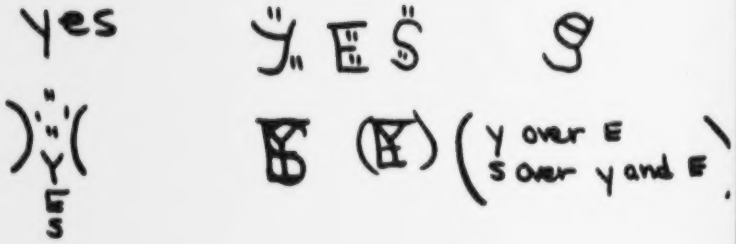


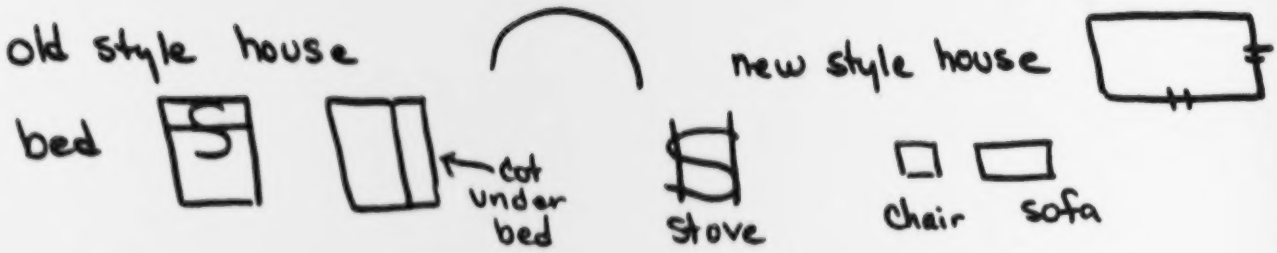
Minnie's Design:

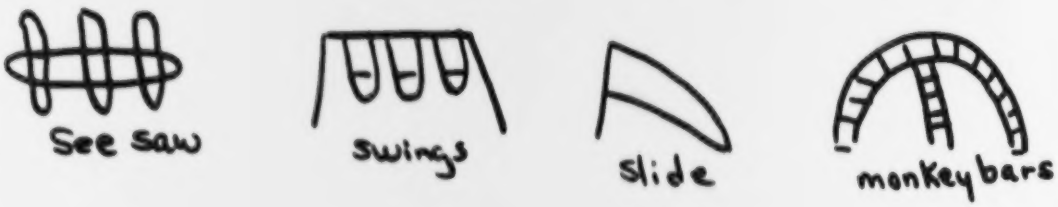


Kuskokwin Area:

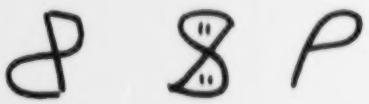
Girls' "Yes" Figures:







Various Symbols for Old Woman:



Spy Sign: ← This is a symbol for when boys are seen "spying" on the storyknifing.

FISH CAMP SYMBOLS: